

Hebrews 12:1-3

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[0 : 00] Well, folks, maybe you want to turn to Hebrews chapter 12 now. This is where we've got to in our little series that we've been in. Since we've been back in the building in the evenings, looking at the Christian life as it's been described to us by the author of Hebrews, who's encouraging his generation to keep on keeping on for Jesus Christ.

So we took in 40 verses last week, which was a big task, but I think we got there. What we're going to do maybe mercifully this week is we're going to hone in on just two verses. We're just maybe going to slow the pace down, which is ironic given what we're looking at, but we're going to slow the pace down a little bit and just focus on these couple of verses, which are so key to the letter.

So let's just read them. This is verses one and two of Hebrews chapter 12. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything.

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

[1 : 26] Amen. And I'm sure God will bless the reading of his words and it will not return to him without accomplishing the purposes which he has for it. So, if anybody sees me ever going near a boat again, you've got my permission to shoot me.

You said that? Steve Redgrave. Sorry, I shouldn't have asked you to speak. Steve Redgrave said it, right? Steve Redgrave, the roar. Do you know when he said it? He said it rhetorical.

He said it seconds after winning the gold medal at the Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia in 1992, right? Guy was in absolute agony. You feel that in his words.

Every bone in his body aching, every muscle aching. I always love it how reporters just put the microphone straight in an athlete's face straight after they finished the race, which is probably why they get the lines that they do, don't they?

But this is what he did. And here's the reality behind his words, right? Sprinting. I used to do it all the time at school. Sprinting is easy. Right? Easy. It's why you watch UC and Bolton doing the 100 meters back in the day.

[2 : 34] Hardly ever broke a sweat, did he? Right? Sprinting is easy. But endurance running, endurance racing, is unbelievably hard. Some of you might know that if you've done any kind of marathons in your time.

Unbelievably hard. And here is what we're being told about the Christian life tonight. Right? It's an endurance race. Now let me just pause for a second, right?

And just ask you the question I was asking myself all week. Do you think of your Christian life like that? Right? Do you see it in the context of it being a race? Because here's what I was thinking this week.

How often I view my life as almost a series of many, many sprints. Right? I think to myself, if I can get from one holiday to the next holiday, if I can get from one weekend to the next weekend, if I can get from the morning to the evening, then I'll be okay.

Right? Hardly do I ever stop and think about my life as a race? And as I said, ironically, this passage really helped me slow down this week and regain something of the bigger picture of the Christian life.

[3 : 44] think about it. Okay? This, this, this, this, this, I hope tonight will be extremely freeing to think of our lives like this. What does being in a race tell you? It tells you two things.

First of all, that you can expect periods of pain. Okay? If you've ever done any running in Edinburgh, you'll know what that's like. Because what is Edinburgh not?

It is not flat. Okay? One minute you're going downhill and you're thinking, I'm loving this. I could do this all day. Sign me up for the Berlin Marathon. And the next minute before you know it, you're going uphill.

Your calves are tightening. Your thighs are burning. And you're thinking to yourself, I just want this to end. Now, how often is that the Christian experience in the Christian life?

Okay? Some of us will be here tonight and we're flying with the Lord. Right? Every conversation you have with somebody somehow gets to the God. You're on fire for the Lord.

[4 : 41] And some of us will be here and we're in really tough periods of our lives. Okay? We're dealing with some really painful stuff. We're asking some really big questions.

And if truth be told, we are thinking about tapping out. Or in some kind of way, just dropping the pace a little bit. Can expect periods of pain in the race?

And secondly, there's a prize at the end. Okay? We're not running aimlessly. We're not, we're running somewhere. There's a goal.

There's an end. There's a heavenly city. There's a resurrection future. There's a risen savior. That's the prize. Him. And so verse one, here's what our author writes.

Let us run with perseverance the race which is marked out for us. You see in the text? Let us run with perseverance.

[5 : 40] Here's what's going on in Hebrews 11. Background to Hebrews here. When these folks, this generation of Christians, when they first came to know Jesus, they came flying out the traps.

Okay? What did Linford Christie used to say? He used to go in the B of the bank, didn't he? Right? That was these guys flying out the traps for Jesus. If you want to flick back to verse 32 of chapter 10, if you've got it there, you'll see this.

Our author writes, verse 32 of chapter 10, he says, recall the former days. Right? Verse 32 of chapter 10, recall the former days. In other words, remember back to what it was like when you first came to know Jesus.

Right? You were standing with those fellow brothers and sisters who were going to prison. Right? You were standing with, I'm with them. That's what you were saying. You were looking out for those who were struggling in the fight and to get them back on their feet again.

Some of you might know what that was like. Remember back when you first came to know Jesus.

Right? Boom. Flying out the traps. That was these guys. But now, the pace has dropped massively. Right?

[6 : 47] They've been rejected probably by their Jewish community that used to be part of. Ridiculed by a world that thinks Jesus is offensive. All of a sudden, they began to drop the pace.

And he writes, you're in an endurance race. Why does that come as a surprise? This stuff is happening to you. You've got to see. You've got to keep going. You've got to keep going. You're in an endurance race.

Do you see the word, therefore, at verse 1? Right? Every time you see a therefore, we've got to ask, what is it there for? And it connects this invitation back to everything that's come before in chapter 11.

This great cloud that he's talking about here is every single person that has been mentioned in chapter 11. As if to say, these guys were in the same race that you're in.

Right? What does he call them? He calls them witnesses. Love that word. Witnesses. Two meanings here probably. Firstly, their lives. Everyone in Hebrews chapter 11. Their lives are testifying to the fact that the race is worth persevering in.

[7 : 52] Right? First image. Second image. These people, as it were, they finished the race. They're now either watching on from the stands or maybe they've even made it down the side of the track and they're cheering you on saying, keep on going.

Keep on going. You know, I loved a bit this week hanging out with Abraham. Right? As I read about him, remember we met him in chapter 11 hanging out with Abraham this week. You could feel him. Keep on going.

Keep on going. Keep on going. Friends, we're in a race. We're in a race, an endurance race. Now, the what of that race, what we encounter is going to look different for each of us.

Right? The unique things that we'll come up against while we're on this race, the things that the Lord knows about that he's sovereignly put there and the where will be different for each of us.

Where we are in this race.

Right? We've got no idea where we are in this race for all I know I was thinking about I could hit the finishing line tonight when I go home. Right? But make no mistake of what might be different, the where might be different, but the race is exactly the same and the goal is exactly the same and the goal is to finish the race.

[9 : 04] Finish the race. And so just in the time we have remaining let me just ask us two questions from this text to help us think about our race.

Okay? Here's the first one. Friends, what might be slowing us down? Okay? What might be slowing us down? You see this halfway through verse 1.

What does he say? Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

And here's the cultural image that the author's tapping into.

One that every single reader of this would have been very familiar with. So what you did if you were an athlete in the day, if you were serious about competing, serious about winning, what you used to do is to run stark naked.

That's what you did. So that nothing held you back. Now don't dwell on the visual for too long, okay? Except to make, see the two spiritual realities that I think that image is actually really helpful for.

[10 : 04] Okay? Is there anything, friends, that we need to strip back from our life so that we can run better in the Christian life, in the Christian race?

Okay? Stuff that's getting in the way. Okay? That's just clogging up our spiritual life. You know, I found out this week did it with our Hoover, right?

It was Hoover and all of a sudden the thing cut out wasn't working anymore. Thinking to myself, get me that guarantee, get me that customer service number, I'm going to give them a piece of my mind. Do you know what it was?

The thing was just clogged up. Right? Just spent ages just trying to, pulling out hairs and bits of couscous, that's always nice, isn't it? Pulling things out of the Hoover and all of a sudden once I got everything out, put it back together, hey Presto, it was working again.

Friends, stuff that's clogging us up, right? It could be anything. So many good things can do this, right? I uninstalled Twitter on my phone last night because I realised it's just eating up my time.

[11 : 07] It's just eating up my time. Right? It could be anything. A DVD box set, a place and a committee, a do-it-up house, a job that's demanding all your hours, a relationship that you're in that's just not helpful.

Friends, what is clogging up your walk with and your love for Jesus? I remember a good friend of mine phoning me and telling me that he just stopped going to the gym. Because he realised that it was eating up all his time and it was doing more than that.

Actually, it was obsessing him with how he was looking and he thought, do you know what? It's nonsense. And here's the other spiritual truth about the athlete, right?

I was trying to think about it this week. To run naked is to open yourself up, isn't it, in the eyes of the watching world and to make yourself very vulnerable.

And let's just give you an example of what I mean here. Remember, we were on holiday down in Cornwall a few years ago and we went to just Google churches. The first one that came up with a New Frontiers one, which was a couple of miles away, so we went there.

[12 : 13] They gave us a wonderful welcome. But the thing that struck me when I was there struck me most, it was the notices, right? Hear me out, it was the notices. because the pastor stood up and he gave out the notices for the week and he talked about the guys who meet at the Tesco Cafe on Tuesday mornings.

I thought, what on earth is that notice about? So I got chatting to him after the service and what it was, it was a group of people in the church who met up regularly with one another to help one another in their battle with pornography, right?

And this is what they did. They just met up in Tesco Cafe on a Tuesday morning, right? Committed to sharing struggles, right? Determined to help one another in their Christian race, right?

Committed to speaking the gospel to one another, right? You've fallen this week, get back up, remember, we're saved by grace, keep your eyes on Jesus, right? No condemnation because of his blood. Okay, okay, okay.

And they start going again, right? This is what they did. They met up in this cafe to talk this stuff out. Get the stuff on the computer, anything you need to do to just to cut it out. This is a sin that so easily

entangles and they did this in front of the church.

[13:25] The church didn't need to know who went. Okay, it was a kind of what happens in Tesco Club, stays in Tesco Club kind of thing. But everyone in the church knew this went on and it was inspiring them to take the action that they needed in their lives to deal with a sin that so easily entangles.

And I remember thinking, how great is that? My friends, maybe some of us today it will be Tesco Club, right? Right? And let's make that happen.

Let's get in touch and see if we can meet up to chat things out, to help one of us. But whatever that looks like in your life, that is the call of this passage to make yourself vulnerable, right?

Whatever it is, friends, in our lives that we struggle with to come forward and say, Lord Jesus, I need you. Right? Think of it like this. What is the first thing that we read happens when Adam and Eve sin?

Right? What do they do after they sin? They hide their nakedness. Right? Think about it. They hide their nakedness. But here's what the gospel does. It frees us from having to pretend and live a life of empty religion and covering up and pretending that we're sorted.

[14:35] Right? Because if we were sorted, then Jesus would not need to, would not have needed to die on the cross for us. Okay? Jesus bore our shame. He bore it all.

He paid every penny of the ransom to buy us. And you see how this invites us to admit our struggles and to run to him for fresh grace. I know I read somebody on the internet this week.

They put up, I think it was on Facebook, they said, what is your favorite line from a hymn? Right? And just boom, boom, boom, all these comments. It was wonderful to read. Do you know what my favorite line from a hymn is? It's these words from Horatius Bonar.

I penned these all these years ago. He said, I heard the voice of Jesus say, come unto me and rest. Lay down, thou weary one, lay down, thy head upon my breast.

I came to Jesus as I was, weary, worn, and sad, and I found in him a resting place, and he has made me glad. You know, so thankful that that is the Jesus that we encounter day after day after day.

[15:42] Friends, what is holding us back? What is slowing us down? It's a great question to ask ourselves. Here's the second question then.

What's slowing us down? Second question, just really simply, are we looking to Jesus? Okay, tell you about something Alex and I found happened a few weeks ago with our girls.

we would ask them to do something, right, just wash your hands before dinner, or just put your knife and fork away at the end of the meal, something like that, and every time we used to ask this, right, they would just go, huh, huh, right?

Somebody told me this is like living with a three-nager, that's what it is, but huh, every time we asked, huh, I would look to each other thinking, where did they learn this from? Right, I don't think they've learned it from others, but I don't know, right?

Do you know where they'd learned it from? They'd seen it in this little cute, innocent little TV program that they watched just before dinner, and they picked it up from one of the characters, right?

[16:45] The character would just go, huh, huh, anytime she had to do something, so this is what they do. Here's the real simple truth of life, friends, that what we look at affects the way we live, right?

What we look at affects the way we live. So do you see where we're invited to look here, right? Do you see as we run the race, verse 3, fixing our eyes on Jesus.

That's how we're to run, by looking at Him, looking at Him. What is it about Him? Let me just give you three quick things, okay? Here's the plea, in the race, never stop looking at Christ, never stop gazing at Him, breathe Him in, savour Him, take hold of Him.

What do you need to take in and hold of? Three quick things. Firstly, that He's our Saviour, okay? Follow with me in the language here, the pioneer and the perfecter of our faith, right?

Notice that those two are both perfect words, okay? In terms of Jesus being our perfect Saviour, that He has ran the race perfectly, that His righteousness is ours, it is done, okay?

[18:03] Those words, it is done, not it will be done. It's not like the John Lewis crane, right? Down near the Omniscientor that says this will be done and what's it say, like summer 2022, just bear with us while this work goes on.

It's not like that with Jesus, right? His work is done. It's done. These are perfect, finished words. That's why we get at the beginning of this letter, we're thinking about this morning as well, weren't we?

What is Jesus doing in heaven? He is sitting. He's sitting. This is done. We are His, His perfect life, His righteousness, we claim as ours, which means that when we stumble in the race and we stumble all the time, friends, what gets us back on our feet is not legalism, right?

It's not, I want to do better. What gets us back on our feet is who Jesus is for us, His grace. Right? When sin does entangle us and we trip, we always come back to who He is for us and He is the pioneer and the perfecter of our faith and that's who we are.

Right? I love what Scottish minister Robert Murray McShane used to say to his congregation and he would have said it in the city here. He said, for every one look at your sin, I want you to take ten looks at Christ.

[19 : 27] Right? Just do that next time in your head. You fall, look to Jesus, look to Jesus, look to Jesus, look to Jesus, look to Jesus, look to Jesus.

I look at Jesus, look to Jesus, look to Jesus and our eyes are fixed on Him. He's our Savior. What is He secondly? He's our example. Do you see in the text, for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, scorning its shame.

So the question is, what made Jesus endure the cross? Answer, it was the joy set before Him.

What was that joy? Going back to being in the very presence of His Father that He'd left to take on our flesh.

And because of His work, the presence that He will one day bring all His ransomed people into that we might enter into and share in the joy of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

And that joy saw Him endure the most horrific of deaths. And I hope that encourages us wherever we're at right now that when we feel the pain of suffering in this life, right, whether it's suffering in general or suffering because we stand for Jesus and something in us in that moment longs for that day, friends, in a really profound way, we are sharing in something of the life and the death of our Savior.

[20 : 58] And I often think what often gets me through a run and I run home from the office during the week and did it this week. When you're running in the rain, what gets me to the other side, right, the joy that's set before me so often is a warm shower.

Right, we'll go through anything because I know the warm shower is there. And this challenged me, how much more should the joy set before me eternally cause me to keep running the race with my eyes fixed on Christ.

Friends, he's our Savior, he's our example and thirdly, he's our helper. He's our helper and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

See, the author here brings the attention to where Jesus is. He's seated at the right hand of the throne of God. What's he doing there? Is he twiddling his thumbs wondering what time am I coming back?

No, he ever lives to plead for us. He's praying for us. Isn't that a magnificent thought? He's praying for us. We thought this morning if you tuned into that how often our prayer lives are substandards, they're up and they're down.

[22 : 05] Christ's prayer life for us is people that never falters. He's given us the spirit, the very presence of God living and working in us and he promises to equip us with everything that we need to live a life for his glory.

But friends, just as we finish here, we're in a race. We're in a race. You know, there were two other guys in the boat with Steve Redgrave when he won his race.

Right? You had Matthew Pinson, he was the other guy. The two of them got all the limelight. Right? Fast forward a little bit and there's a knighthood in there as well as gold medals. The third guy that was in the boat was the cocks.

Right? His job is just to know his roars inside out, is to know what they need to hear and to know when they need to hear it and keep them going right to the finish line.

Right? And that's what the author to the Hebrews is doing right here to a tired and to a battered generation who are on the verge of giving up. He's saying, come on guys.

[23 : 18] Come on, we can do this. Come on. Let's keep going. Let's keep running. Oh, that you would know what's at the other side of the finish line and you would know that that is worth enduring every single strain, every single insult, every single sleepless night, every single hardship because

that prize, oh, it's so good.

one thing to do practically just as we finish this. Friends, I want us to think about, maybe some of us know right now, those in the race who are really struggling at the minute.

Right? It's one of the beauties of being a church family. Right? Those in the race who are really struggling to keep going at the minute. You know, I love those scenes in the marathon, you know, when somebody's struggling and somebody comes in from the crowd or whatnot and they just go under the shoulder, don't they?

Just take them around and they just carry them, help them keep going, carry them on. Well, maybe that's something that all of us could do this evening as we go home, as we leave here. Maybe it's even somebody that's sitting here, you know what they're going through.

Friends, could you be the cox in their life? Could you be Hebrews chapter 12, the one who just helps lift our eyes to who Jesus is? So if anyone sees me going anywhere near a boat again, you've got my permission to shoot me.

[24 : 41] Friends, in all the pain that's in that quote, don't miss the fact that the context of it is that the guy who's just won the gold medal. Christian, you're in a race, we're in a race, let's fix our eyes on Jesus and let's run it with perseverance.

Let me pray. And Father, in the silence now, we would just maybe bring to you our own prayers.

Father, of the ways that where we know we are struggling right now and Father, thank you for that promise that in Christ Jesus, Lord, you promised to give us the power to live a life of godliness and so Lord, I pray, Lord, wherever we're at that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ would be so precious to each of us and that your spirit would be at work in each of our lives.

Father, help us fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and the perfecter of our faith. And we pray in his precious name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.